

## **'Khud Chalke Baba Aaya ey'**

**Mrs. O.Tara Singh\***

\* 125, Jalan Za'aba 70100 Seremban, N.S. Malaysia. Email: sitara1968@yahoo.com

It was in the year 1986, in the month of March. So that makes it a little over 20 years ago. But my memories of that event are crystal clear even today. The Sikh '*sangat*' of our town, Seremban, was informed at it's weekly assembly a week earlier that there was a handwritten 'Bir' of the holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib that had come into the possession of the Sikhs in the Diaspora, and was being taken on a tour of various countries so that we may have '*darshan*' of this revered Granth.

It seems that a group of pilgrims to the holy '*Gur asthaans*' in Pakistan were told that there was a Pakistani family in whose possession was a handwritten Guru Granth Sahib, believed to be about 300 years old and which this family was eager to hand over to the Sikhs. The reason being that they were unable to look after it any more. The pilgrims, we were told, made contact with this family and collectively raised the price demanded by them, and for a sum of three hundred thousand Pakistani rupees had obtained this Granth. I'm sure the pilgrims were elated as it is not everyday that one gets to see a handwritten 'Bir' of the holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib. It is only with great good fortune and the attendant grace of the Almighty that such an opportunity comes your way.

Since this was a collective effort and acquisition, it was decided that in all fairness, it should make a tour of several South East Asian destinations to accord the Sikh '*sangat*' an opportunity to have a glimpse of such a treasured manuscript.

So this is an account of how and why we were recipients of such wonderful news that day some 20 years ago. The Granth was coming to our shores to visit several gurdwaras in Malaysia and Singapore and probably even Thailand and Indonesia. We were told that since pilgrims from all these countries, as well as those from the western hemisphere had played a part in its acquisition it was imperative that Sikh '*sangat*' everywhere should have a chance to glimpse this rare handwritten Granth.

Which country was going to be its final destination and who would be permanent hosts to this 'Bir', I do not know. I have made some enquiries in this respect, but without much luck. All I know is that in anticipation of its arrival we were caught in a flurry of activity on that propitious day, the 8th of March, 1986.

I have some 25 photographs recording its arrival in a shower of flower petals, carried reverently on the head of a '*sewadar*'. The queue of men, women and children waiting patiently to view the '*motian vargi likhaayi*'. Upon request some of us were permitted to sit '*Maharaj di taabia*' and recite a few lines. We took photographs of a few pages and I am sending 4 of them with this write up. These are marked A, B, C and D. Picture 'A' is the first page and captures prominently the ornamental border design. Pictures 'B' and 'C' were taken at random. When I compare these with the printed version of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib I find 'B' corresponds to an '*ashtapadi*' in Raag Gujri Mahla 1 on pages 505-506 while 'C' corresponds to Vadhans ki Vaar, the 4th and 5th Pauris on pages 587-588.

Picture 'D' shows the last page and is of special significance because we wanted to see if 'Raagmala' was recorded as a part of the '*bani*' or not. It is very much there and '*putr raagan ke athhaareh...*' is decipherable. So also is '*megh raag putran*' in the line above if you look closely at the right hand top corner. Below that is recorded the recipe for making the ink which says they added some gold dust to it too! We were told that such recording of the method of preparing the ink was a trend of the times.

The 'Raagmala' is an intriguing issue because of the two opposing opinions as regards its being part of '*bani*' or an apocryphal appendage thereto. This being a handwritten document

some 300 years old, we were relieved to find it included therein. It is strange that the controversy surrounding this short composition is still raging and we are unable to put it to rest. When I mentioned this to a friend, she lent me a book from her library entitled, 'Sri Kartarpuri Bir de Darshan' by Bhai Jodh Singh, published by the Panjabi University, Patiala. Bhai Jodh Singh it appears, was a member of a committee entrusted with the task of examining this 'Bir' and making a report to the SGPC in 1945. The findings of this committee constitute the text of the book here mentioned. From this book I have obtained a photocopy of the last page of the Kartarpuri Bir that also shows a sample of Bhai Gurdas Ji's handwriting below it. The writing is apparently the same and obviously Bhai Gurdas Ji has written the 'Raagmala' on the last page of this manuscript. This Kartarpuri Bir is the genuine, original Aad Sri Guru Granth Sahib that Guru Arjan Dev Ji compiled and which is presently in the possession of Dhirmal's descendents, now reposing in Kartarpur in Jullunder District. This looks like an interesting piece of evidence and I am sending it along marked E. This is merely by way of observation and I feel our scholars need to research this issue and arrive at a conclusion.

Coming back to my description of that evening's events again; after having 'darshan' of the 'Bir' we conducted a 'kirtan diwan' and at the end of the programme was sung a short poem that was specially composed for the occasion and which also I am taking the liberty of sending a copy of. This was really the 'Jorhmela' of a lifetime for me...an enormously emotional and spiritual experience.

The next morning our special guest, the handwritten 'Bir', was ready to leave for its next stop. As we stood showering fresh flowers on it as it was being carried aloft on its way out, an assortment of emotions gathered like the clouds that bring rain to the parched earth, and from the innermost recesses of my heart I felt a surge of reverence burst forth and tears welled up in my eyes, as we stood there bidding farewell to the visible embodiment of our Ten Masters who had journeyed to Malaysian shores to meet us mortals. As I turned around I saw how touched by this experience were so many others, as I could hear sniffles and see some of us wiping away their tears.

Even today when I go through my album of photographs, I gaze and ponder upon those 25 photographs that adorn its pages and in my mind's eye I can still see how...*Khud Chalke Baba Aaya Ey*. These pictures never fail to stir a storm of sentimentality and my head sways ever so gently from side to side in an expression of utter awe and appreciation of a memory so cherished.

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## **Darbar Sahib: Beyond Gold & Glitter**

*Dinker Vashisht*

The Golden Temple's pre eminence as a tourist destination is well known. Frequented by *filmwallahs*, foreign plenipotentiaries, corporate honchos, politicians and legions from all walks of life, it is probably India's most famous prominent tourist destination. Even then, a look at the actual number of visitors doesn't fail to astound. As Gunbir Singh, CEO of Divine Destination, an Amritsar based travel agency says, "At an average 75,000 visitors eat lunch at the temple's community kitchen daily. It has been observed that no more than one fourth of the total visitors to the temple take the meals. Simple arithmetic would tell that the total number of people visiting the shrine daily could be in proximity of three lakhs." With such amazing high number it appears strange that Amritsar's tourism industry in specific and economy as a whole haven't thrived. After all the multiplier effects of flourishing tourism have been well expounded!

Explaining this anomaly Mr. Singh says, "The problem is that the tourist comes, visits

Golden Temple and then returns. It is a single day visit. He does not need to stay in hotels or spend time elsewhere in the city. Agreed, Golden Temple is our unique selling proposition, but we need to build other tourist destinations also. I should say that of late things have started to change, with the Punjab government and other agencies taking up the cudgels." Efforts are also on to sell the antiquity of the city. As MP Navjot Singh Sidhu says, "Amritsar is a historical place with a rich culture. It is a veritable treat for all the lovers of history."

Renovation of several important historical spots, hitherto unknown, is expected to start shortly.

For instance, a site has been identified which the local historians claim to be the place where Alexander fought his last battle, i.e. the venue of the mighty Macedonian's final conquest in which he sustained the wounds that ultimately proved to be fatal. Recent excavations have thrown evidence that following the Pyrrhic victory in the battle of Hydaspes against emperor Porus, he proceeded with his conquest onwards but was met with stiff resistance from the kingdom of Kaath. Historians believe that this explains the mutiny of soldiers and the mystery why Alexander never went beyond Beas.

Similarly, at a village which served as a halt for Maharaja Ranjit Singh's caravan when it moved from Lahore to Amritsar one can see heart shaped bath tubs which he had built for his queens. International agencies have also come calling. Recently a delegation headed by Ravi Singh, CEO, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), India visited Amritsar and evinced interest of setting up a state office in the city. The WWF is also keen on a project to cleanse the Hudiara rivulet, an international waterway, which has been highly polluted and flows into Pakistan. The government is also keen to promote the Harike Pattan wetlands, a famed bird sanctuary which for some reason has remained unknown to tourists. It came in news after Yash Chopra shot select scenes of his movie Veer Zara here, but even then the number of visitors remain sparse. One reason for this is perhaps the restricted entry.

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## **Threats to Security**

A year ago the Times of India had a news item datelined Amritsar: A Laskhar-e-Taiba militant who has identified himself as Karim Ansari has threatened to blow up Sri Harmandir Sahib on October 6. He has also threatened to destroy Amritsar railway station, Raghunath Temple and railway station of Jammu.

In the letter addressed to Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) president Avtar Singh Makkar, the militant has warned to turn Jammu and Vaishno Devi shrines into a pile of dead bodies.

Makkar told TOI that they had sent the letter to the SSP, and it was now duty of the administration to make adequate security arrangements. Task Force, internal security force of SGPC, had been put on alert, he added.

IG (Border Range) Mohammad Mustafa said police were trying to verify authenticity of the letter. "Prima facie it doesn't appear to be a genuine letter," he said, adding police were taking all precautions in the wake of the threat.

He said policemen in plain clothes were posted around Sri Harmandir Sahib.

SSP SS Sriwastave said, "It seems to be an ordinary letter, and does not appear to carry any weight."

He said even such threats couldn't be taken lightly. Security would be reinforced around Sri Harmandir Sahib.

SP (city I) Kaustubh Sharma said the letter, written in Hindi, also mentioned to blow up a place on October 8 but that was not legible. "Yeh kisi sirfire ka bhi kaam ho sakta hai" (it

could be the handiwork of some eccentric person also),” he added.

He said earlier also similar threat was received following which traffic moving towards Sri Harmandir Sahib was restricted. But the restriction was relaxed following pressure from SGPC and some politicians, he added.

Sharma said police would strengthen security around the holy shrine with minimum inconvenience to the common man. As many as 25 to 30 policemen remain deployed around Sri Harmandir Sahib at any given point of time and many more in civil uniform keep an eye on unwanted elements roaming around the temple.

According to unconfirmed reports, the letter appears to have been posted from Phagwara around September 27 or 28.

On May 5, Ansari had also threatened to blow up shrines in Jammu, Jalandhar and Amritsar besides destroying Jalandhar railway station.

**[Courtesy: *Times of India*]**

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